

Find New York Costly? A Novel Organization Sells Adventure Cheap

Members Explore the Worlds
Of Morticians, Motormen:
The Man Who Talks to Trees

By WILLIAM E. BLUNDILL

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—Stick with Howard Goldberg and you'll learn more than you may ever need to know—like how to do the Swim and the Irish Jig, make stained glass windows, defend yourself against more than one attack at a time (the Japanese art of Aikido), or find a runaway husband.

Along the way, you'll get the chance to chat with deep-sea divers, marriage counselors, cardiac surgeons, morticians, gag writers, subway motormen, cultists of various persuasion, psychic mediums and assorted other citizens. All this is entertainment on the cheap—an evening of such diversions will cost you less than the tip you'd leave at one of Gotham's finer watering places.

Mr. Goldberg, a bespectacled, 35-year-old freelance technical writer, is the founder and president of Adventure on a Shoestring, Inc., a novel organization with the motto, "Exploring the World Within our Reach . . . Within our Means." The club's world is New York City and environs, a universe in itself. Thanks to the bird-dog instincts and persuasive powers of Mr. Goldberg, members are often able to see people and places here that no solo well-heeled Manhattan playboy could if he even knew they existed.

Tips From a Marathon Diver

Some time ago, for example, members visited a chapter of publicity-shy Gamblers Anonymous, where they heard reformed refugees from the gambling table tell their stories. And they've picked up inside tips on the local cuisine from Edmund Love, author of *Subways Are for Sleeping*. For no particular reason, Mr. Love is eating his way in alphabetical order through all of New York's restaurants; at last account, after 13 years and 2,500 dinners out, he had nibbled into the "M" column.

Membership in Adventure costs only \$7 a year for individuals and \$10 for married couples. An additional fee of 50 cents to \$1 is levied for each event a shoestringer decides to attend. Most events require no other outlay, save for subway, taxi or bus fare. The fees pay for publication of the club's newsletter five times a year, remuneration to speakers and others who charge for their services, and the modest \$40 weekly salary drawn by Mr. Goldberg, who arranges club events—usually five or six of them a week.

The idea for the organization came to him after a wallet-flattening night on the town in 1961. After taking a girl to dinner and a show, Mr. Goldberg found himself \$65 lighter and decided he hadn't had that much fun. "I knew there had to be plenty of interesting things to see and do in New York that didn't cost a lot of money," he recalls. Adventure was launched soon after with a tour of the New York Herald Tribune's plant at press

On the Couch, Too

By February 1963 the club had 100 members, and Mr. Goldberg decided to incorporate and levy fees. Today there are some 2,000 shoestringers, ranging from laborers to corporate executives and from age 17 to 85. The club has never had a formal membership drive, but the missionary zeal of some members keeps applications flowing in. On a trip to the opening of the Verrazano-Narrows bridge here, they signed up five new applicants during the ferry trip to Staten Island. Word about the club also has spread to other cities, and Mr. Goldberg flew to San Francisco recently to help interested parties there set up a similar operation.

He gets his ideas for club attractions from careful perusal of newspapers (one recent story prompted a visit to a half-acre dairy farm in the asphalt wilds of Brooklyn), listening to radio shows, and, to an increasing extent, from club members with contacts of their own. Mr. Goldberg then pursues his quarry, offering, if need be, cash for his or her participation. About 50% to 60% of Adventure's speakers are paid, but many are so intrigued by the club and flattered by its interest in them that they donate their time.

Naturally, only a fraction of the membership will find a given event interesting enough or convenient enough to attend—fortunately for Mr. Goldberg, who would have trouble shoestringing 2,000 shoestringers into a member's apartment, a common meeting place for many events. Even at that, things get a bit crowded at times; 42 people elbowed into a small East Side apartment last spring to get instructions on how to get rid of a ghost from Hans Holzer, an investigator of psychic phenomena.

Though many of Adventure's attractions involve chats with various people (including one session with a chap who claimed he could talk to trees), this is by no means the rule. Shoestringers attend sports events, ranging from Gaelic football and cricket to plain old grunt-and-growl wrestling matches. They have explored old Indian caves in Inwood Park, Manhattan, and houses said to be haunted. And they took a bike trip through the deserted canyons of the financial district one Sunday recently.

Though members pay little for their fun, this does not mean that many could not afford New York's costlier, more conventional diversions. It's just that the bizarre events Adventure offers often have so much more appeal. "You couldn't do alone the things the club does even if you had a lot of money. It's a gem of an idea," says shoestringer Sarah Wilonsky.

Squeamish members, however, can be pardoned for passing up one visit to the offices of New York's chief medical examiner. Those who went toured a grisly exhibition hall and storeroom containing human organs and tissue samples, murder weapons of all kinds, and a display illustrating how to determine whether a victim has been strangled or hanged. Adventure members also braved the fumes of the Lincoln Tunnel last April, and got a behind-the-scenes look at its traffic control facilities. This, too, may not have appealed much to commuter members, who may have idled away many an hour stuck in one of its subterranean traffic jams.

Adventure also offers more conventional entertainments, once again with an eye to cost. The club often arranges theater parties—but concentrates on off-Broadway shows on week-